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AUTHOR	Gregg, Soleil
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ABSTRACT

Because increasing numbers of children come to school with problems caused by poverty, divorce, drug use, and teenage pregnancy, schools may no longer be able to limit themselves solely to academic roles. This brief argues that schools, families, and communities need to work together to help children overcome the challenges that they face. It also recommends that policymakers, school staff, and parents should work together to improve: (1) child health, safety, and development; (2) home-school communications; (3) parent-school involvement; (4) home study; (5) site-based decision-making; and (6) school-community relationships. Supplements that review parental involvement initiatives, state-school collaborations, federal-state collaborations and specific state legislation in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia are also included. (MDM)

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AEL

Policy Briefs

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APPALACHIA EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY
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PARTNERSHIPS: SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN

This brief presents the need for schools, families, and communities to work together for children; describes actions schools can take to involve families and communities; and suggests what policymakers can do to promote and support effective partnerships. It contains supplements that review parent involvement activities in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia, and highlight exemplary parent involvement programs in each state. The brief was prepared by Soleil Gregg, AEL staff.

This country is experiencing "devastating changes in the social fabric" (Clinchy, 1993, p. 611). During the past 30 years, violent crime has increased 560 percent, illegitimate births have increased 419 percent, divorce rates have quadrupled, and teenage suicides have increased 200 percent (Bennett, 1993). One-fourth of all children today are born into poverty, and almost half a million are born to teenage mothers. Twenty million children are supervised by adults who are not family members, because one or both parents work outside the home (Chynoweth & Dyer, 1991). Child abuse and neglect have increased 259 percent in the past 14 years (Hoyle, 1993). Because of divorce and illegitimate births, 60 percent of all children will live in single-parent households at some time in their lives (Kirst, 1993). Estimates of the number of homeless school-age children vary from 322,000 to 1.6 million (Crosby, 1993). The changes in the nation's social structure that have generated these statistics mean that schools face new challenges in educating students.

Because increasing numbers of children come to school with problems caused by poverty, divorce, drug use, and teenage pregnancy, schools may no longer be able to limit themselves solely to academic roles. Nor can schools act in isolation to overcome such obstacles to learning. Experts agree that schools, families, and communities all share responsibility for children's development and learning. Since education is a continual process occurring both in and out of school, schools are just one institution that can educate, or fail to educate, children; therefore, all Americans shoulder responsibility for public education (Hoyle, 1993; Pallas, 1989). "The bottom line," says Robert Sexton, director of Kentucky's Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, "is getting the individual parent and business person engaged. We are really talking about a civic movement, not just an education movement" (Walsh, 1993, p. 12).

Research shows that parent involvement in schools increases student achievement and improves student attitudes towards school (Coleman, 1991; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Gotts, 1989; Henderson, 1987). By working together as partners, schools and families can maximize their efforts and resources to improve children's chances for school success.

Moreover, schools and families exist within the context of community, whether it is narrowly defined to mean neighborhood, or broadly defined to include cultural, civic, religious, political, and business organizations. In both senses, community implies commonality—of location, values, beliefs, culture, and/or purpose. These areas of commonality create the basis for considering the community as both an influence on and a resource for children and schools.

While research supports parent involvement in schools, beliefs, practices, and policies are slow to change. Long-standing beliefs and practices may actually be barriers to forming effective partnerships to improve learning (Perroncel, in press). Schools that fail to develop and use their resources—families and communities—may unknowingly be limiting student success in school.

Sharing Responsibility for Learning

Epstein (1992) identifies five areas of shared responsibility for learning between schools and homes, and a sixth area for collaboration between schools and communities. These six areas can provide a model to both policymakers and school staff for adapting parent and community involvement programs to state and local needs.

Health, safety, and developmental issues. Some families are unable to meet their children's basic health, safety, and developmental needs or create positive conditions in the home for learning. Experts warn of a "growing number of families encountering problems so severe that their ability to sustain or improve their economic, health, and social conditions is threatened" (Chynoweth & Dyer, 1991, p. 5).

Because of children's increasing health, social, and mental health problems, "Schools are expected to provide more social services, more counseling, more psychological and nursing services" (Lacayo, 1993, p. 35).

Schools can directly assist fami-

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lies with these problems by providing information and training on parenting and child development, and by linking families to health and social services within the community. James Comer's successful School Development Program includes a mental health team to deal with students' problems and prevent new problems from arising. Schools based on his model also offer workshops to parents on nutrition, finance, and substance abuse (Gursky, 1990).

Home-school communications. Schools are responsible for communicating to parents about children's progress and school activities. Traditionally, this has been accomplished by report cards, newsletters, and occasional parent/teacher conferences. But home-school communications need not rely on print. Kentucky's Family Resource Center staff make home visits to establish rapport with families and to identify needs. Carter Lawrence Middle School in Nashville uses the Transparent School Model to communicate with parents via telephone. Parents can call the system to learn about daily class activities and homework assignments, and teachers can use a computer-based system called Compu-Call to send messages to parents (Bauch, 1989). Research shows that two-way communications that encourage feedback are more effective for involving parents (Epstein, 1992). Ames, Khoju, and Watkins (1993) have found that teachers' communications with parents can influence parents' feelings of comfort in the school, their involvement in children's learning, and their children's motivation to learn.

Schools should be aware that cultural and educational differences among families can interfere with home-school communications. Some families do not speak English; others may be illiterate. James (1988) advises, "Identifying cultural differences is only one step. Knowing how to effectively use that knowledge is key" to implementing successful programs (p. 21). Comer points out that asking low-income children to do well in school can create conflict between the home and school, because it asks children "to aspire to positions in life that are different from their own parents" (cited in Gursky, 1990, p. 52). He urges schools to involve parents in programs in ways that dispel antagonism and build support.

Working together at school. Because most parents work full- or parttime during school hours, few are available to volunteer at school. Others feel uncomfortable in schools because of past experiences or insecurity. Teachers' own prejudices may alter their perceptions about both parents' willingness and ability to participate in their children's education (Davies, 1989), and students' ability to succeed in school (Reck, Reck, & Keefe, 1993).

Schools wishing to maximize parent involvement need to schedule sports events, performances, and other activities at times that are convenient for working parents. Schools can also provide training to both teachers and parents to promote cultural understanding, cooperation between home and school, and parent participation. The most effective school programs offer a variety of involvement opportunities to accommodate parents' preferences, abilities, and time (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

Supporting study at home. Research shows that this type of parent involvement has the greatest effect on student achievement (Cotton & Wikelund, 1989; Epstein, 1992; "Parents and Schools," 1988; "Parent Pairing," 1993, March 23). However, many parents do not know how to help their children. Penn and Childers (in press) have demonstrated that parents will work with their children to help them learn when they are provided with inexpensive, easy-to-use materials that are not time-consuming. Hoover (cited in "Home Is," 1993, March 23) claims that training parents to coach children in study skills may make a lasting difference in student achievement. He identifies nine specific skills for parent coaching: time management; use of reference material and libraries; active listening; verbal presentations; note-taking and outlining; test preparation; reading rates and purposes; visual analysis of maps, graphs, etc.; and writing reports. All parents, regardless of socioeconomic levels or education, can support study skills by designating a time and place for homework and encouraging student responsibility.

Sharing decisions about education. Site-based decisionmaking and local control of schools are involving parents and community in the decisionmaking process. Some states, like Kentucky and West Virginia, have mandated parent involvement in school governance. Although involving parents in decisionmaking is important, it may be difficult. Heller (cited in "Realize When," 1993, February 23), surveyed economically diverse suburban parents. He found that parents want to know about school security, discipline procedures, how to contact the principal, positive aspects of schools, and curriculum, but not about school administration or governance.

Collaboration with communities. Schools can use the community as both a resource and a partner. Partnerships involve businesses, community members, and organizations as mutual stakeholders in the education of future workers and citizens. Pallas, Natriello, and McDill (1989) urge educators to

> become more aware of and involved in the family and community contexts of their students, both to understand the problems these contexts present for the education of students and to learn to draw on the strengths of families and communities to enhance the education of students. (p. 21)

In turn, Sexton (1992) calls for communities to become proactive in helping schools: "We need...more local efforts where citizens take responsibility for the broad education of all the community's children" (p. 32).

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Implications for State-Level Policymakers

Research tells us that home-school partnerships promote student success in school, but no magic formula exists for creating effective parent involvement programs. Epstein's five areas of shared responsibility between schools and families can provide a model to both state policymakers and school staff for adapting programs to state and local needs.

Policymakers are in the unique position of being able to stimulate action through leadership and mandate action through policy. Through leadership and policymaking—legislation and the allocation of funds—state leaders can help ensure the success of parent involvement in a state (Nardine and Morris, 1991).

Leadership: A Catalyst for Change

In recent years, both political parties have effectively used the bully pulpit to accomplish their education agendas at national, state, and local levels. State policymakers, too, can demonstrate their commitment to school/home/community partnerships by what they say as well as what they do.

State-Level Parent Involvement Initiatives in Kentucky

Because Kentucky believes parent involvement is critical for student success, the state's policymakers have addressed the importance of parent involvement through legislation and program initiatives.

The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA)

KERA established school councils for school-based decisionmaking in all public elementary and secondary schools. Councils are composed of two parents, three teachers, and the principal or administrator. The council has the authority to develop school policy, and determine the number of personnel to be employed in each job classification, instructional materials to be purchased, and what school-based student support services the school can provide. Councils can also make limited decisions about curriculum, use of school time and space, discipline and classroom-management techniques, extracurricular activities, and instructional issues. The Division of School-Based Decision Making in the state department of education tracks parent involvement in school councils.

KERA also created an interagency task force to establish family resource centers and youth services centers through contracts between the Cabinet for Human Resources and local boards of education. Centers are located near elementary or secondary schools in which at least 20 percent of students qualify for free school meals.

Family resource centers, located near elementary schools, promote parent involvement in schools through a variety of programs and services. Centers can provide money for parent-initiated school projects. Some centers in the state have become certified day care centers, providing fulltime preschool for two and three year olds, after-school care for four to twelve year olds, and fulltime care in summer and when school is not in session. They also offer a families-in-training program that includes home visits, group meetings, and child development monitoring for new and prospective parents; parent and child education (PACE); training for day care workers; and referrals to or provision of health services. PACE funds model programs for preschool children and their parents in geographical areas of educational and economic need. While preschoolers participate in developmental programs, parents receive training in basic academic and parenting skills. Structured play and learning activities involve parents and children together.

Like family resource centers, the youth services centers associated with secondary schools encourage parental involvement, but primarily target adolescent needs (KERA, 1990). Because of high teenage pregnancy rates, some centers provide direct services to teenage mothers, including parenting skills classes.

The general assembly appropriates funds for centers, available on a competitive basis. Local boards of education must approve centers' grant applications before local superintendents submit them for funding. Allocations range from $10,000 to $90,000, based on a formula of $200 per pupil eligible for free school meals; the average for awards to date is $71,500. So far, 222 centers have been funded to serve 414 schools; an additional 605 schools are eligible for grants. Funds awarded for the 1992-93 fiscal year total $15,476,500 (Terry Conliffe, personal communication, February 10, 1993). The Cabinet for Human Resources monitors activities of the family resource and youth services centers.

Federal-State Collaboration

The Kentucky Department of Education provides fiscal support for a state-level parent/educator team that administers a parent resource center program linked to special education; the department also provides parent involvement training for local districts.

Parent resource centers are designed to provide training, resources, and support to parents, educators, and others seeking to help children and youth with educational disabilities. Each center is staffed by a parent of an individual with an educational disability and by a professional in special education. This team gives parents and educators a framework for working together as partners and advocates for children and youth with disabilities. The state has 25 centers.

Parent resource centers, with fiscal assistance from the Division of Exceptional Children Services, coordinate a yearly statewide conference, with an average attendance of 400 parents and educators, to provide consistent awareness training, information, materials, and networking opportunities. Participants must cover their own conference expenses. Registration scholarships are available through the centers on a limited basis. Other agencies, such as the Kentucky Special Parent Involvement Network, assist with conference funding and some parent expenses.

Owsley County applied for and was awarded two grants from the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST), U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which directly supports school/family connections through the Family/School Partnership program. Citing strong evidence linking parent involvement to improved student achievement, Congress made it FIRST's

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mission to promote promising new programs and to share successful practices that encourage and support school-family partnerships. FIRST funds parent involvement projects submitted by local education associations, and includes successful models in the National Diffusion Network (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Booneville's Family-School Partnership in Owsley County was funded by a FIRST grant during the 1989-90 school year. The program featured small classes with parent tutors, and offered a range of support services including health, nutrition, and psychological counseling. The following year, Owsley County Schools received funding for Family-School Partnership, which equipped parent centers with IBM's "Principle of the Alphabet Literacy System" to train parents to help students with school work at home (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Contact: Jacque Hukill, KY Department of Education, 502/564-6117.

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School and Parents Team Up for Kids in Sand Gap, Kentucky

The Parent Resource Center associated with Sand Gap Elementary School promotes parent power through involvement in school activities. The center schedules parent volunteers to work in the school two days a week: parents spend one day organizing and supervising children in hands-on activities such as art projects; they spend the second day as teachers' aides, copying and preparing instructional materials.

The center also helps parents fund special educational projects at the school. This past year the center sponsored Heritage Days, a weeklong, schoolwide exploration of Appalachian and Native American cultures. Students in each classroom researched an aspect of Indian life, which they presented to the entire school in skits, exhibitions, and performances. Special guests showed children how to churn butter and weave cane for chair seats.

Since medical services are difficult to obtain in rural Sand Gap, the center is working to establish an on-site clinic to help meet families' medical needs. Through collaboration with the health department, the center hopes to staff the clinic with a nurse one day a week. Parent volunteers have been trained to administer fluoride treatments and assist with vision and hearing screenings, and are already using these skills at the elementary school.

The center has recently purchased a van so that staff can visit families at home; parent volunteers help make these visits possible by keeping the center open while staff are away. Most home visits are in response to teacher referrals. When fire recently destroyed a neighborhood home, center staff mobilized the community to provide the family with clothing and household goods.

Parents may attend the center's effective-parenting classes to learn parent-child communication skills. They may also participate in counseling services, support groups, or parents' game day, where learning takes place in an informal setting. A child-care coordinator is on staff to provide day care services for preschoolers while parents participate in programs and volunteer activities.

Each month the center's parent incentive program recognizes outstanding parent volunteers with gifts of food, clothing, money, or personal items. The real winners, however, are the children, who reap the benefits of teamwork and mutual respect between center parents and the school.

Contact: Denise McKinney, Sand Gap Family Resource Center, 606/965-2043.

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State-Level Parent Involvement Initiatives in Tennessee

Tennessee leaders have encouraged parent involvement through numerous policy statements. In addition, the legislature has provided financial incentives to schools that want to start parent involvement programs.

Legislation and Policy

Tennessee's vision for education directs schools to actively seek and involve parents as education partners (Tennessee State Board of Education, 1992). The Parent Educational Participation Act (1990) encourages local boards of education to develop programs for voluntary parental participation in a variety of school activities. The Parent-Teacher Partnership Act of 1989 permits districts to schedule parent-teacher conferences, and the Education Improvement Act of 1991 (EIA) requires each school district to set aside at least one noninstructional day within the school calendar for such conferences.

Because stressful family conditions such as homelessness, poverty, divorce, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy reduce the effectiveness of education, the state supports collaboration between and among schools and social service agencies. Family Resource Centers, permitted by EIA, will provide a service delivery network to meet family needs through access to available community resources. School boards may apply for start-up grants of up to $50,000 from a pilot grant pool of $400,000 presently available through the commissioner of education (Jan Bushing, personal communication, March 17, 1993). School systems that establish Family Resource Centers will be given priority to receive other program-specific state funds.

The Policy for Early Childhood Education and Parent Involvement in Tennessee (Tennessee Board of Education & Tennessee Department of Education, 1991) promotes early childhood learning outcomes, parent involvement, family empowerment, and coordination of services for children and families. Using Head Start as a model, it supports state funding of early childhood education and parent involvement programs for four-year-old at-risk children, and complements and supplements the currently underfunded Head Start program. Funding for this program will be phased in during 1992-1996. A policy council composed of at least 50 percent parents or guardians of children participating in parent involvement programs will assist local school boards with program governance and administration.

State-School Collaborations

In 1986 the Tennessee General Assembly appropriated $1,000,000 to design and implement a statewide parent involvement program. Since 1989, a line item in the state budget has provided an additional $500,000 yearly to fund parent involvement programs designed and initiated by local schools. Schools submit applications detailing program goals to the state department of education, Division of Curriculum and Instruction, and can receive up to $10,000 to initiate and implement programs. The state has awarded approximately 50 grants, mostly to elementary schools, for diverse projects such as school-volunteer training, active-parenting classes, and a family math class. Followup surveys reveal that over 95 percent of the parents who participate in programs become more involved in their children's education (Lueder, 1989). The $500,000 also funds the Governor's A+ Award for Community Commitment to Excellence in Education, which annually recognizes community-oriented projects that create effective connections among communities, schools, and parents.

Grants have funded many exemplary parent involvement programs, including the Caldwell Early Childhood Center in Nashville, which employs a home-school coordinator to develop ways to connect homes and schools. A large number of the center's students live in an inner-city housing project. The program engages parents in their children's education and provides adult education classes.

Federal-State Collaboration

Washington County applied for and was awarded a grant from the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST), U. S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which directly supports school/family connections through the Family/School Partnership program. Citing strong evidence linking parent involvement to improved student achievement, Congress made it FIRST's mission to promote promising new programs and to share successful practices that encourage and support school-family partnerships. FIRST funds parent involvement projects submitted by local education associations, and includes successful models in the National Diffusion Network (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Washington County's LIFE (Learning Is for Everyone) program promotes high expectations for students while providing home-learning activities and teaching skills in parenting and behavior management. The program focuses on rural students in grades K-8 (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Contact: Martin Nash, TN Department of Education, 615/741-6055.

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Two Generations of Parents Involved in Memphis Program

Parent involvement takes on new meaning at the Comprehensive Pupil Services Educational Center in Memphis: most of the 140 girls in the Adolescent Parenting Program will become mothers during the school year. The program works with parent involvement on two fronts. First, the parents of the program's participants must agree to certain stipulations before their daughters are accepted as students. Foremost among these is a commitment to their child's regular school attendance, since attendance rates are typically low among pregnant teenagers who are experiencing the discomforts of pregnancy. Parents must also agree to let their child participate in the program's services, which include mental health evaluations and prenatal care.

A large portion of the program's grant pays for social workers, who visit students' homes on a regular basis if students' families are welfare recipients. Approximately 60 percent of the students qualify for this service.

The program invites parents of the pregnant teens to attend special presentations throughout the year, such as a traditional right-of-passage program for those of African-American heritage. A foster grandparent program at the school provides each student with a personal advocate and friend.

The program also promotes parent involvement for the new generation of parents—the students. All students take parenting classes and get hands-on experience working in the school's on-site day care facility, where students' babies can spend the day. There, students learn to care for their own children. The parenting class teaches health and safety procedures for infants and young children, child development, and how to get assistance when problems occur. In addition, students take one class each day that is taught jointly by a social worker and a psychologist. The class focuses on self-esteem, anger control, child abuse prevention, and drug and alcohol counseling.

The program does not overlook regular academics. Teachers use a bank of computers to individualize mathematics and English instruction to meet students' needs. A summer program helps young mothers who have dropped out of school complete course requirements for graduation.

The program collaborates with health and social service agencies to develop school policies. Collaborative teams include teachers, mental health professionals, a nurse, foster grandparents, and reading volunteers who work individually with students.

The program's comprehensive approach promotes both present and future parent involvement. While students are getting the support they need from parents and foster grandparents to overcome hurdles and complete school, they are also learning how to meet the next generation's health and developmental needs. In this way, the Adolescent Parenting Program hopes to break the cycle that makes students at risk for school failure and to replace it with one that empowers students for school success.

Contact: James Paavola, Adolescent Parenting Center, Memphis, TN, 901\325-5456

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Telephone: 304/347-0400 ◆ 800/624-9120 (toll-free) 304/347-0487 (FAX)

State-Level Parent Involvement Initiatives in Virginia

All education stakeholders in Virginia recognize the importance of parent involvement in schools, so state leaders have taken steps to assure a high degree of parent involvement.

Legislation and Policy

The Standards of Quality, mandated by legislation and adopted by the state board of education, require local school boards to develop both a policy for school-community communications and community involvement, and guidelines to encourage parents to help their children with schoolwork at home. Local boards may provide training for this purpose for parents of children in grades K-3 (Code of Va., 1992).

While the Standards of Quality focus on school districts, the Standards of Accreditation look at parent involvement on both district and local school levels. Schools submit reports certified by the principal and district superintendent to the state department of education to document the involvement of parents and community members in biennial long-range school improvement planning, curriculum studies, and program evaluation. The standards also require local school boards to develop a homework policy with parent input ("Regulations Establishing," no date).

The Virginia Department of Personnel and Training (1992) issued a policy that gives all state employees, not just parents, up to eight hours of paid leave each year to volunteer at local schools. Employees may also use the leave to meet with their children's teachers or principals and to attend school functions. The state department of education is offering transformational grants to schools to implement school reform and restructuring. To qualify, schools must involve parents in planning, and projects must include multiple strategies for home-school partnerships and encourage active parent involvement (Virginia Department of Education, 1992). In addition, the advisory council to state restructuring efforts at the K-3 level involves all education stakeholders, including parents.

The state department of education is currently developing a program to study the parent involvement literature and to gather best practices from around the state. Schools can use the information to develop and expand parent involvement programs.

Federal-State Collaborations

Virginia, like Kentucky and West Virginia, has a network of parent resource centers funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A parent/educator team housed in the Student Services/Early Childhood Division of the state department of education coordinates the centers on a state level. Besides providing on-site training and information in the field, centers provide yearly in-service training for parents and teachers on topics such as teacher strategies for involving hard-to-reach parents, main-streaming children with disabilities into regular education classrooms, and building cooperative teams to meet students' needs. Although the centers were created for parents and teachers of disabled students, some centers have expanded to include parents and teachers of all students in response to increased mainstreaming and popular demand.

The Arlington Public School Division applied for and was awarded a grant from the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST), U. S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which directly supports school/family connections through the Family/School Partnership program. Citing strong evidence linking parent involvement to improved student achievement, Congress made it FIRST's mission to promote promising new programs and to share successful practices that encourage and support school-family partnerships. FIRST funds parent involvement projects submitted by local education associations, and includes successful models in the National Diffusion Network (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

The Arlington Family/School Partnership Project received the grant to offer staff development workshops in family/school partnerships, create a countywide technical team to support parent involvement activities, and produce a bilingual training manual and resource guide for parents and educators (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Contact: Judy Hudgins, VA Department of Education, 804/371-7421.

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Virginia School Meets Parents Halfway

Schools in Emporia, Virginia, are mobilizing to involve parents in education. In 1990, the division received a FIRST grant to convert a 36-foot recreational vehicle into a mobile Parent Resource Center (Richardson, 1993). Staffed by a resource specialist and an instructional aide from Greensville County Public Schools, the center travels through neighborhoods and to businesses to build bridges between schools and parents of at-risk children.

The vehicle provides a positive place where parents can work with teachers to learn tutoring skills for helping their children at home. For example, the center's education team shows parents how to create learning tools using simple household items to develop children's reading skills and stimulate creative play.

Approximately 60 percent of the county's parents have used the center's services, which also include instructional videos, games, and a lending library. Preschoolers who accompany parents occupy themselves in a play area in the back of the vehicle that is equipped with toys and books. Staff are available to supervise and read stories to children while parents are busy.

The school publicizes the mobile center's schedule in the local paper, and parent volunteers phone other parents to let them know that the center is coming to their neighborhood. Sometimes staff will knock on doors and invite parents and children inside. They even park the mobile unit at businesses so that parents can use its resources during lunch and breaks.

The program has been so well received by area parents that another grant was written for a walk-in center, which will be staffed by parent volunteers. This center will provide teachers from the district a place to conduct workshops and hold parent-teacher conferences, and will give parents a meeting place to share information about effective tutoring methods.

The center's success proves that parents care about and want to be involved in their children's education. Because the mobile unit visits parents on their turf, one of its primary benefits has been to dispel the negativity that can exist between parents and schools. A secondary benefit has been helping preschoolers who visit the center develop positive attitudes toward school. The main beneficiaries of the program, however, are the children whose parents now know how to help them do their best in school.

Contact: Margaret Lee, Chapter 1 specialist, Greensville County Public Schools, 804/634-3748.

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State-Level Parent Involvement Initiatives in West Virginia

Parent involvement is the centerpiece of West Virginia's education reform efforts. Several state-level laws and policies in West Virginia require parent involvement in schools.

Legislation and Policy

The state board of education's Policy 2200: Parent Involvement in Education (1989) provides guidelines for county boards of education to use in developing parent involvement programs. The policy requires local boards of education to establish policies that include training for teachers, administrators, and parents to realize education goals; two-way home-school communication systems; and home-school partnerships for each school.

West Virginia specifies parent involvement as a standard for school accreditation and establishes improvement in parent and community involvement as a necessary criterion for determining state schools of excellence (W.Va. Code Ann., 1992).

To ensure community involvement in statewide school reform efforts, Senate Bill 1 (1990) required all schools to establish Local School Improvement Councils consisting of principals, teachers, service personnel, parents, community members, business representatives, and, for secondary schools, students. Councils can apply for waivers from state and local laws and policies to implement alternatives to present school operations, as long as alternatives meet or exceed state standards. Schools must cooperate with any council programs or policies that encourage parent involvement or encourage businesses to release parents to attend parent-teacher conferences. Councils can also apply for state grants to implement programs to improve instruction: parent participation is one criterion for grant eligibility (W.Va. Code Ann., 1990).

The department of education's Office of Professional Development, in conjunction with AEL, has sponsored statewide teleconference training for council members, including parents. Two videoteleconference training sessions were broadcast statewide last year, and two additional sessions will be broadcast this year.

Federal-State Collaborations

The Office of Instructional Services works with parent involvement in the Chapter 1 program and oversees the state's six child development centers, which offer integrated health and education services to at-risk preschoolers. The Chapter 1 program has conducted three training sessions this year to teach parents home learning activities to use with their children.

The Office of Special Education administers the Parent-Educator Resource Center Project, which is similar to programs in Kentucky and Virginia. The project's main purpose is to ensure all children, especially those with special needs, full access to education opportunities. The 38 centers train parents to speak for their children in procuring education benefits and train educators to involve parents in positive home-school relationships. They also provide a variety of other services to parents and educators: parenting-skills training, support groups, parent-requested workshops, and interagency collaborations for securing resources. Centers are staffed by teams of parents and educators.

Logan County applied for and was awarded a grant from the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching (FIRST), U. S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, which directly supports school/family connections through the Family/School Partnership program. Citing strong evidence linking parent involvement to improved student achievement, Congress made it FIRST's mission to promote promising new programs and to share successful practices that encourage and support school-family partnerships. FIRST funds parent involvement projects submitted by local education associations, and includes successful models in the National Diffusion Network (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Logan County's Cooperative Parent/Child Remediation and Attitude Enhancement Program provided students take-home computer programs for diagnostic and prescriptive work in reading and mathematics. The program's pretests and posttests allowed participants and their parents to chart their progress while developing mathematics and reading skills (Cross, LaPointe, & Jensen, 1991).

Contact: Karen Larry, WV Department of Education, 304/558-2681.

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Extraordinary Effort by Putnam County Schools Stimulates Parent Involvement

Educators and administrators in Putnam County believe that parents are crucial to a child's success in school. To back this claim, they have actively sought to empower parents with information and know-how and to elicit parent input in school decisionmaking. Last year the county's district office sponsored a parent rally to build support for schools. This spring, the school system, the county's Parent Advisory Council, and the Chamber of Commerce sponsored a one-day parent conference with the theme, "Inviting Student Success...Parenting for the Future."

The conference featured two nationally acclaimed speakers: one addressed the parent's role in student success, and the other emphasized skills students need for the twenty-first century. Parents could also choose to attend two of eleven special-interest sessions on a variety of topics, including: effective study skills, setting high standards for performance, multiple intelligences, educational and financial planning for postsecondary education, parenting skills, and Classroom 2000.

To encourage parent involvement, the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce awarded a cash prize of $1,000 to the school with the highest percentage of parents attending the conference. Free child care was also provided.

The parent conference reinforces Putnam County's continuing efforts to include all education stakeholders in bottom-up school improvement and decisionmaking. For the past three summers, the county has sponsored School Improvement Academies to bring together school improvement council members (including parents) to hear informative speakers and to design individual school improvement plans. To date, 450 persons have participated in the academies. So that council members can tailor plans to their school's needs, the county first surveys parents, students, and school personnel, then presents school councils with an information packet that includes survey results and student performance data. Councils can compare current data to that from previous years to evaluate their plan's effectiveness.

The true measure of Putnam County's success will be student success. Actively involving parents in schools—from helping children with homework to making decisions about school improvement—helps to ensure that the results will be positive.

Contact: Lydia McCue, director of secondary education, Putnam County Schools, 304/586-0500.

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Departments of education can provide leadership to promote program development and success by providing technical assistance and information to local schools and districts. Recognizing that responsibility for parent involvement activities is often divided among various agencies, offices, and programs on local, state, and federal levels, they can collaborate with other agencies to provide cohesive, comprehensive services to children and families.

Researchers at the federally funded Center on Families, Communities, Schools, and Children's Learning tracked federal and state policies over a 12-month period. They determined that although 30 states had begun to define how schools, parents, and community agencies could share overlapping responsibility for education, local districts continue to report fragmentation, discontinuity, and lack of comprehensiveness (Palanki & Burch, with Davies, 1993). State policymakers can help determine if federal, state, and local parent involvement initiatives function coherently, or if they compete and conflict to create fragmentation and confusion.

Policymaking: Commitment in Action

Although many states and organizations advocate parent involvement in schools, few states have supported their words with actions—legislation, guidelines, and funding (Partee, 1991; Nardine & Morris, 1991). Policymakers committed to action can first examine state-level policies and practices to determine if they "encourage, assist, and support (schools) in their efforts to effectively involve parents" (Sattes, 1986, p. 5). They can then look to Epstein's areas of shared responsibility among schools, families, and communities for guidance in decisionmaking.

Health, safety, and developmental issues. Policy can encourage, promote, or mandate collaboration among agencies and institutions that work for children and families. Recent legislation in AEL's Region seeks to address health and social problems that may interfere with learning. Family Resource Centers and Youth Services Centers in Kentucky, Family Resource Centers and the Policy for Early Childhood Education and Parent Involvement in Tennessee, and Family Resource Networks in West Virginia link families to social service systems within the community to provide single points of contact for meeting family needs.

Home-school communications. Policy can require that schools develop communication plans that consider families' cultural and educational differences and encourage feedback. West Virginia requires schools to provide evidence that families have received the school's report card as part of the accreditation process. Virginia and Tennessee require evidence of parent involvement in order for schools to be eligible for grants.

Working together at school. Policymakers can determine if current policy and practice "encourage, assist, and support principals and teachers in their efforts to effectively involve parents" (Sattes, 1986, p. 5). They can encourage or require schools to offer parents a variety of options for involvement, to make schedule adjustments to accommodate working parents, and to record how many parents participate and at what levels. They can make sure that teachers are trained to understand and work with parents of all cultures, and provide time and/or compensation for the training.

Supporting study at home. Since many parents would like to help their children at home but do not know how, policymakers can see that teachers are trained to give parents the information they need. They can also ask state education agencies to develop and provide materials and information to schools and to parents to support home learning activities. For instance, the Preschool Division of the Kentucky State Department of Education provided all children in its 1992-1993 program with copies of AEL's *Family Connections*, a take-home guide for parents to promote home learning. In some states, policymakers may need to promote adult literacy programs so that parents are empowered to value and support education for their children.

Sharing decisions about education. School reform efforts nationwide emphasize site-based decisionmaking and local control of schools. Both West Virginia and Kentucky require schools to involve parents in school improvement and decisionmaking. State policymakers can be sure that the move to site-based decisionmaking is supported by training and information for school staff and parents, so that it functions effectively and successfully.

Participation in school decisionmaking is a new role for most parents, and they may feel intimidated by school staff, ignorant of school regulations and procedures, and unfamiliar with the parameters of the job. Since all parents need to know how to advocate for their children to assure that no child falls through the cracks of the education system, policymakers can see that parents are getting the information they need to make good decisions about education in general, and their child's education in particular.

Collaboration with communities. Policymakers can make sure that existing regulations do not prevent or discourage the formation of school-community partnerships. They can also actively promote these partnerships through legislation: for example, West Virginia policymakers stipulated that a member of the community at large and a business representative be included on local school improvement councils (Senate Bill 1, 1990).

Mandating parent involvement does not guarantee that parents will become involved in schools and learning. However, "a clearly defined and articulated policy on parent involvement can encourage the development of programs designed to involve parents" (Fleming, in press, p. 63).

Helping our children overcome obstacles to learning to achieve their full potential in school and life will require partnership—parents, schools, communities, and local, state, and federal agencies working together toward a vision of academic excellence and achievement for all students. According to a member of a Florida school reform panel, "The real challenge is not in convincing people that children should be well educated, but in helping them to see how they can become meaningfully involved in insuring that happens" (Walsh, 1993, p. 12).

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